

new directions

...offering
information &
inspiration
to individuals with
disabilities and
their families
as they direct their
own supports and
services



Volume 3, Number 10
October 2005

Finding, Hiring and Sharing Staff Strategies and Suggestions from Families

Editor's Note: This is the second in a periodic series of articles highlighting information shared at the Boggs Center's "Gathering" on self-directed services.

Finding, Hiring and Sharing Staff was one of several workshops offered on April 16th, 2005 at the fourth annual Self-Determination Gathering in Somerset, NJ. The gathering continued a tradition established several years ago by individuals and families participating in the Division's first self-directed services initiative, the Self-Determination Initiative. The information shared at the gathering can benefit anyone who is directing their own services and who is hiring their own staff.

*"...the job of
providing support to
a person with a
disability does not
take a 'special' person.*

*It is just people being
with people..."*

The workshop on finding, hiring, and sharing staff focused on people sharing with each other what has actually worked in their lives. Individual participants, families, Support Brokers and other professionals all came together in a morning and afternoon session to learn from one another's successes and mistakes. Participants in the workshop were paired up and charged with identifying one successful strategy that they had used to find good staff. This effort to build on the strengths of what we are currently doing and capitalize on the knowledge of all workshop participants yielded several helpful strategies. It also sparked a broader philosophical discussion related to improving staff recruitment efforts.

Support brokers Ellen Andrews and Neeta Das were present, as was Alison Humanick from Easter Seals (the fiscal intermediary and employer of record for many staff). Also on hand to share experiences were individuals and family members directing their own services. Additionally, individuals and family members who are not yet receiving supports beyond a day program were in attendance. Many families shared contact information with each other so they could continue their exchange of ideas after the workshop.

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In Real Life: Get Out The Vote 2005

Voting Information for Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families

Elected officials regularly make decisions that are critical to the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families. This includes decisions about health care, education, justice and civil rights. Because of this, the right to vote is one of the most cherished and valuable rights we have. By voicing our opinions as voters, we can make a huge difference in the everyday lives of individuals with disabilities. While the act of voting does not guarantee that our preferences will prevail, every choice not to vote is a choice not to participate in the decision-making process – and we, as a community, must participate in decision-making. The issues are just too important!

This November, Gubernatorial and General Assembly elections will be held. The outcome of state elections makes a huge difference with regard to the issues affecting people with disabilities because many laws, regulations, initiatives and budget decisions are made at the statewide level.

Q: Who Can Vote?

- You must be a citizen of the United States.
- You must be at least 18 years of age by the date of the election.
- You must have the capacity to vote. *(see box, right)*
- You must be registered to vote.
- You must be a resident of NJ and the county in which you live at least 30 days prior to the election.
- You cannot be serving a sentence or on parole or probation for an indictable offense.

Q: How do I register to Vote?

To vote in any election, you must be registered at least twenty-nine days prior to the election. Registration can be completed in person or through the mail with your County Commissioner of Registration. Voter registration forms can be found at your Municipal Clerk's office, library, local Chapter of The Arc, DMV offices, other state agencies or online at: http://www.state.nj.us/lps/elections/voter_reg_app.pdf. Forms must be filled out and mailed in. Faxes and e-mail are not acceptable because an original signature is required.

According to the law:

- It is not legal to deny someone the right to vote because they have mental retardation or any another disability.
- It is not legal to deny someone the right to vote because they have a legal guardian.
- It is not legal to deny someone the right to vote because they live in an institution, developmental center or group home.
- It is not legal to deny someone the right to vote because they receive services or supports related to a disability.
- Any voter requiring assistance in voting must be allowed to receive that assistance from a person of his or her choice (other than the person's employer or union).

Q: What if I Can't Vote in Person?

Absentee voting is available to qualified voters who cannot be physically present at the polls on election day. There are two steps.

1. You must fill out the application for an absentee ballot.
2. Once you get the ballot, you must fill it out and mail it back. Filling out the application by itself does not constitute a vote! *Once you've applied for an absentee ballot, you cannot vote at the polls on Election day* (even if you never filled out the ballot and returned it).

Applications for absentee ballots must be received by the County Clerk's office by noon at least 7 days before the elections if done through the mail, or, if done in person, by 3pm the day before the election.

(continues on back cover)

Adapted with permission from the Arc of New Jersey, 2005 Get Out the Vote Campaign. For more information, please contact: Elizabeth M. Shea, Esq. Director, Governmental Affairs at The Arc of New Jersey (732) 246-2525 ex.24 or by e-mail at eshea@arcnj.org

Hiring and Firing (continued from the cover)

The following are some of the strategies offered by individuals, family members, support brokers, staff and other professionals at the workshop:

Match characteristics, personalities and interests to pick the right staff.

Connect people with others who enjoy the same type of activities. Know the characteristics that are preferred. Does the individual that is hiring prefer spending time with someone who is loud or quiet? Spontaneous or planful? Active and athletic or more sedentary? Younger or older? Does the person prefer men or women? Participants also noted that 'Essential Lifestyle Planning' offers useful tools to help match staff to the needs and preferences of the individual.

Empower current staff to recruit new staff in the community.

Look close to home for friends and neighbors. 'Word of Mouth' advertising works.

Always be on the look out for potential staff. If the person needing staff knows someone working elsewhere in their community, who they get along well with, they may want to try recruiting them.

Keep recruiting and application materials on hand when you are out to make the process the least time consuming and cumbersome as possible.

Keep it in the family. Or not.

Families discussed the pros and cons of hiring family members to work as staff. It is clearly a personal decision - only you know what will work for you and your family.

Be Flexible

Explore the possibility of live-in housemate scenarios or the use of 'au pairs' and be aware of PASP program for extra hours.

"Be blatantly honest about what you expect and the realities of the job..."

There are different ways to hire & fire

Make it more personal by hiring for yourself, or consider using an agency. One way is not better than any other - chose the way that works for you. Don't skimp on interview time, after all, this person will be in your home providing support and should be accepted as part of the family. Spend time with person up initially. "Be blatantly honesty about what you expect and the realities of the job," suggested one participant.

Don't be afraid to enforce a probation period, and be ready to let someone go if it appears thing are not working out.

Use Creative Advertising

Your ad can make all the difference. Some people have found the words "companion" and "activities" work well in ads.

Capitalize on Community Events

Support Broker Ellen Andrews shared her strategy of successfully recruiting staff by renting a booth at a 4H fair. Ellen and the individuals who needed staff were on hand to meet and greet potential support professionals. A parent talked about using colleges and universities, such as The College of New Jersey as recruiting grounds and targeting specific departments, such as psychology and education, that may yield greater interest.

Participants of this workshop talked about how important it is to demystify the term 'disability.' Being in the community and having people see folks with staff shows others that it does not take a 'special' person to support someone with a disability. This is what we all do within our families and communities every day. It is people being with people.

PLEASE ADD ME TO THE MAILING LIST:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State/Zip _____

Send to:
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CCS Communications
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Hopewell, NJ 08525

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Get Out the Vote: continued from page 2

Q: How do I find out more about the candidates?

This year's elections in New Jersey are for the Governor and the General Assembly. There are 40 Districts in NJ with two Assembly members from each District serving as elected officials. To learn who the candidates are in your area, go to www.arcnj.org/governmental_affairs.html and look at the district locator or go to www.congress.org and entering your zip code.

Two resources to help you find out more about the candidates are:

The NJ League of Women Voters

204 West State Street • Trenton, NJ 08608

609-394-3303 • www.lwvnj.org

LWV Democracy Net – www.dnet.org

Project Vote Smart

One Common Ground • Philipsburg, MT 59858

Voter's Research Hotline 1-888-VOTESMART (1-888-868-3762)

<http://www.vote-smart.org/>

Most candidates also have their own websites where you can access more information. Staff members in their offices are happy to answer your questions.

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Remember: Election Day 2005 is Tuesday, November 8th